

South Dakota National Guard

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Trail of Governors unveils statues of two former SD Guardsmen, governors

PIERRE, S.D. – Statues of two former South Dakota National Guardsmen, who also served as governors, were unveiled as part of the state’s Trail of Governors, in Pierre, June 16.

The Trail of Governors, which began unveiling bronze statues of South Dakota governors in 2012, unveiled four more at this year’s ceremony inside the capitol building that included Leslie Jensen and Joe Foss, the 15th and 20th governors respectively.

“I’m very proud of the men and women of the South Dakota National Guard - who put their lives on the line overseas and do so much to serve us at home,” Gov. Dennis Daugaard said before sculptors unveiled the statues. “We have National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from South Dakota deployed today as we sit here in this rotunda. I’d like to think that these two statues will pay tribute not only to those two governors but all the men and women who served in our South Dakota National Guard.”

Leslie Jensen

Jensen, governor from 1937-1939, a Hot Springs businessman with no political experience, emphasized highway construction and tourism promotion. He strengthened state finances through increased taxes, cuts in state spending, and a reduction in state-held debt.

In 1937, Jensen was both the governor of South Dakota and commander of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, making him the only political figure in the state to be both commander of a National Guard unit and his own commander-in-chief.

Today, this dual status would raise legal and regulatory issues; in South Dakota of the era, questions were never asked. Historians credit his ability to manage both assignments based on his reputation for being one of the most diplomatic persons to ever hold the office of governor.

Raised in South Dakota, where his family owned and operated the People's Telephone and Telegraph Company that served the Fall River county seat and the surrounding area.

Jensen attended the Culver Military Academy in Indiana for high school and served as the regimental supply officer for the 4th South Dakota Infantry during its active duty service on the Mexican border in 1916-17.

From there he went on to serve as the adjutant of the 147th Field Artillery Regiment in France during World War I, 1917-18. He returned home, earned a law degree from the University of South Dakota in 1921, and worked as a collector for the Internal Revenue Service in addition to maintaining his membership in the South Dakota National Guard.

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Jensen served one term as a Republican governor from 1937 to 1939. He decided against running for a second term and subsequently lost a bid for the GOP nomination to run for the U.S. Senate against Yankton's Chan Guernsey. During his tenure, the state's long-term overdraft status was eliminated and the highway patrol established.

When the National Guard started up again after World War I, Jensen was appointed major in the 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery on May 11, 1922 and remained at that rank and unit for 17 years.

The 147th Field Artillery was called to active duty in 1940, then Lt. Col. Jensen went with the Regiment to Fort Ord, Calif., as the executive officer. When Col. Eugene Foster was relieved, Jensen was selected to command and was promoted to colonel as the 147th continued its service first in Australia and then across various islands in the South Pacific. Jensen continued in command until 1944, when he was selected to be liaison officer for Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger, commander of 6th Army, which included in various combinations of I, X, XIV and XXIV Corps.

After the war, Jensen returned to Hot Springs to resume management of his family-owned telephone company. He died in an automobile accident in Rapid City on Dec. 14, 1964.

The Leslie Jensen Scenic Highway, part of U.S. Route 18, has been named in his honor. In 1987, the Governor Leslie Jensen House, his family residence, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Jensen's statue can be viewed at the South Dakota National Guard Museum in Pierre through August when it will be placed near the Soldiers and Sailors War Memorial building.

Joe Foss

Foss, governor from 1955-1959, a heroic World War II fighter ace and Medal of Honor winner, initiated the first state-directed economic development efforts. After leaving office, Foss led the American Football League, hosted outdoor television shows, and served as president of the National Rifle Association.

He enlisted in the Battery F, 147th Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, on Oct. 2, 1939. He was discharged on March 7, 1940, in order to join the Marine Corps.

His accomplishments as a Marine pilot in WW II are well known.

Foss was appointed to form an Air National Guard squadron at Sioux Falls on July 10, 1946. The mission of the squadron would be to recruit and train aircrews and ground crews to a level of operational proficiency, which would enable them to intercept and destroy enemy airborne weapons. The equipment slate for the proposed unit included 25 of the fast and maneuverable P-51 Mustangs, a first-line fighter of the day.

Foss called a meeting for those interested and plans were formulated for organizing the squadron. Authority to activate the 175th Fighter Squadron in South Dakota was issued and on Sept. 20, 1946, the organization received federal recognition. Foss was a lieutenant colonel with the duty assignment of squadron commander, 175th Fighter Squadron. He was promoted to colonel on Aug. 17, 1950.

The 175th was reassigned to the 133rd Fighter Interceptor Wing along with units from Fargo, Duluth and Minneapolis in November 1950. The unit was called to active duty on March 1, 1951 and moved to Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City to provide support for the B-36 bombers stationed there. The unit remained nearly intact and at the end of the active duty was returned to state control and reorganized on Dec. 1, 1952.

Foss was promoted to brigadier general on Oct. 13, 1953.

Foss' statue can be viewed at the South Dakota National Guard Museum through August when it will be placed near the Joe Foss State Office Building.

In addition to Foss and Jensen, statues were also unveiled for Tom Berry, who served as the state's 14th governor from 1933-1937 and Sigurd Anderson, who served as the 19th governor from 1951-1955.

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170616-Z-FO377-0036: The Trail of Governors unveiled bronze statues of four South Dakota governors at an annual ceremony held in the capitol in Pierre, S.D., June 16, 2017. Statues were unveiled for former governors left to right, Tom Berry, Leslie Jensen, Sigurd Anderson and Joe Foss. The statues guide visitors through Pierre's business district and around the state capital. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170616-Z-FO377-0022: The Trail of Governors unveiled the bronze statue of Leslie Jensen, a former South Dakota governor and member of the South Dakota Army National Guard, at an annual ceremony held in the capitol in Pierre, S.D., June 16, 2017. In addition to Jensen, statues were unveiled for former governors Tom Berry, Sigurd Anderson and Joe Foss. The statues guide visitors through Pierre's business district and around the state capital. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)



170616-Z-FO377-0020: The Trail of Governors unveiled the bronze statue of Joe Foss, a former South Dakota governor and founding member of the South Dakota Air National Guard, at an annual ceremony held in the capitol in Pierre, S.D., June 16, 2017. In addition to Foss, statues were unveiled for former governors Tom Berry, Sigurd Anderson and Leslie Jensen. The statues guide visitors through Pierre's business district and around the state capital. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson)

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